



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Channel Islands National Park

The Nature Conservancy
Santa Cruz Island
California



Restoring Santa Cruz Island—An Overview

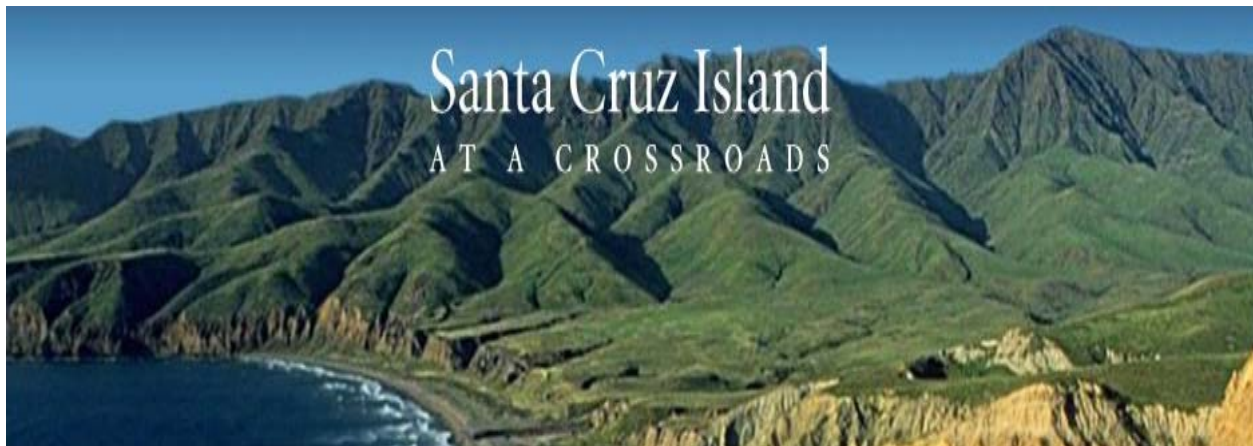
Santa Cruz is the largest and most diverse of the Channel Islands. More than a thousand species of plants and animals inhabit the island's jutting peaks, deep canyons, central valley, and 77 miles of dramatic coastline. Twelve of these species are found nowhere else on Earth. So rich and unique are its flora and fauna that Santa Cruz and the rest of the Channel Islands are often called "the Galapagos Islands of North America."

Just 25 miles from the coast of Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz Island has never been connected to the mainland. This isolation has resulted in a unique ecosystem, with its native inhabitants well-adapted to the island environment, yet very vulnerable to disruption by introduced species.

In the 19th century, domestic animals such as pigs, cattle, and sheep were imported for ranching. The feral descendants of escaped domestic pigs have become a serious threat to the island's sensitive native species. Pigs are highly prolific, producing litters of up to 10 piglets twice a year. Their rooting devastates large areas of vegetation, destroying rare plants and plant habitats and encouraging the spread of invasive weeds. In addition, feral pigs have irreversibly damaged a large number of Chumash archeological sites. At some archaeological sites, pig rooting has been documented to depths of three feet.

Feral pigs have also played a pivotal role in the decline of the native island fox. Golden eagles, attracted by a year-round supply of piglets, began colonizing the island in the 1990s. The golden eagles also prey on island foxes, which did not evolve with an aerial predator. In less than a decade, the island fox population on Santa Cruz plummeted from 1,500 to fewer than 100, a decline of over 90 percent.

On Santa Cruz Island, nine plant species currently struggle for survival, and the diminutive Santa Cruz Island fox—the island's top predator for thousands of years—was recently added to the federal endangered species list.

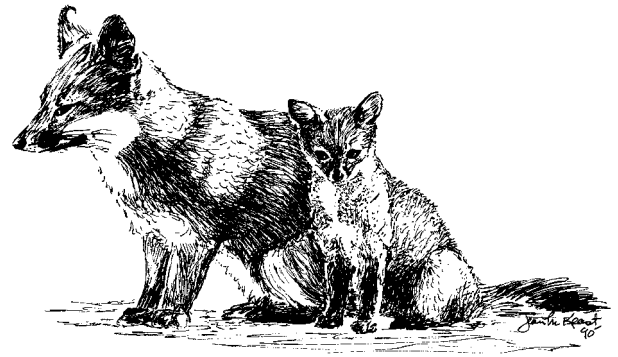


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Saving the Island Fox

A primary focus of the restoration effort on Santa Cruz Island is saving the island fox. The Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service are working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners to restore the island fox population, as part of a broader effort to preserve the biological diversity and ecological integrity of Santa Cruz Island. The restoration program includes five main components:



- Restore island foxes
- Relocate golden eagles to the mainland
- Re-establish bald eagles to their historic range on the northern Channel Islands
- Eliminate feral pigs
- Control the spread of invasive weeds

Santa Cruz Island: Fast Facts

Location: Northern Channel Islands, northwest of Los Angeles, 25 miles off the coast of Santa Barbara, 19 miles off the coast of Ventura, and part of Channel Islands National Park.

Size: 96 square miles, the largest of the eight California Channel Islands.

Terrain: Extremely diverse, with two mountain ranges, a central valley, year-round natural springs, rocky coves, sandy beaches, oak woodlands, bishop pine forests, coastal sage scrub, grasslands, and chaparral.

At stake: Twelve species found nowhere else in the world, including the endangered Santa Cruz Island fox, the island scrub-jay and nine threatened and endangered plants.

Threats: Golden eagles that prey on native island foxes. Feral pigs, which attract golden eagles from the mainland, root up vegetation, disturb the soil, and destroy valuable archaeological sites. Non-native plants that choke out native species.

Conservation Strategies: Save the island fox from the threat of extinction by relocating golden eagles back to the mainland. Eliminate feral pigs, which attract golden eagles. Re-establish bald eagles to their historic habitat.

Partners: The Nature Conservancy, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, Institute for Wildlife Studies, University of California Natural Reserve System, UC Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group, California State University System, Santa Cruz Island Foundation, Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, and Santa Barbara Zoological Gardens.